

Florida Mountain Mining Sites,
Tip Top Mine
Silver City Vicinity
Owyhee County
Idaho

HAER No. ID-31-C

HAER
ID
37-SILCIV
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Columbia Cascades System Support Office
909 First Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104-1060

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
FLORIDA MOUNTAIN MINING SITES, TIP TOP MINE

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Location: The Tip Top mine is located about 150 feet below the summit of Florida Mountain on the western face near the head of Blue Gulch at elevation 7,600 feet. In 1995, access was via a recent road leading to the top of the mountain. Remains of old quartz-hauling roads were no longer extant due to recent excavations and drilling.

Quad: USGS DeLamar 7.5
UTM Zone 11 519820 E 4762642 N

Date of Construction: 1880s to 1920s.

Present Owners: Kinross DeLamar Mine Company

Present Use: To be demolished

Significance: The Tip Top Mine is associated with the most active time of historic mining activity (1880s to 1910s) in Owyhee County and on Florida Mountain. This site contains the most intact minehead buildings of any of the sites examined in this study.

Recorded by: Susan Stacy, Elizabeth Jacox.

Date: June 1995

Site Description:

The extant features at the Tip Top site include a two-part wooden building in the process of collapse and decay, a second wooden building mostly collapsed, a waste rock dump, an adit, a rock wall, the remains of a chute, and a variety of metal, glass, and other items mostly inside the building. Recent grading to create drill pads and roadway access to them has substantially disturbed the site; the buildings are "pedestalled." Bulldozing or other scraping equipment has bladed the ground area just below the perimeter of the building, so that it now appears that the building is situated on an elevated pad above ground surface.

Several ruined wooden buildings remain on the site. The view looking west shows the east-facing side of the two-part building. The section on the left has horizontal tongue-and-groove siding painted green. This will be referred to hereafter as the green building. The longest length of the siding is seven feet. Some of the siding above the window has fallen off, which reveals the vertical planking beneath. The siding is nailed onto this planking. The building rests on a wood foundation. The wall is 10 feet from ground to roof and 14 feet wide.

A single window opening on this side measures about 31" x 25 1/2" high. The opening has a wood frame around it, but no glass remains in the window. This side of the building was the highest side of the building. The shed roof is of metal. The remains of a stove pipe extend from it.

Attached to the green building is a wooden building with its shed roof one-half foot lower than that of the green building and hereafter referred to as the shed. Its vertical wooden siding is fashioned of board-and-batten and is unpainted. A doorway in the wall is visible underneath the planks and metal sheets that composed the roof of the collapsed third building.

Moving around the corner of the shed building, the north-facing side is 10 1/2' wide. The shed rests upon a wood 2" x 4" timber foundation. The highest end of the roof is 94" from the ground and the low end is 74" from the ground. The litter surrounding the building includes a flattened piece of metal that appears to be the remains of a stove pipe.

The front of the shed building has a window opening and a wood door. The door is attached to the walls with hinges. The green building has one window opening. All of its green-painted siding has fallen off and lies at the foot of the building, exposing the vertical wooden planking. Entry to the green building was from a door just inside the shed building's hinged door. The doorway is about 42" x 63". In lieu of wooden battens on the door, its planks are covered with metal strips.

The west-facing end of the green building has one window opening of similar size to the others in the building. Lying nearby is a portion of a collapsed roof or wall and other portions of a collapsed wood frame building, suggesting the presence at one time of another shed, canopy, or other structure. This end of the building is fairly close to the side of the mountain. An animal enclosure or other structure may have been fashioned here between the green building and the mountain. Near the foundation of the building is an upended bucket, which has the following letters and numbers on the bottom: "1 C C 37 A 60" and the word "Chicago."

The roof of both the green and shed buildings is made of corrugated metal sheets placed over wooden planks; some of the planks are 17" wide. The shed window is 22" x 21" and no longer contains glass.

Upon entering the shed door, a metal rail is visible in the floor. This rail extends from in front of the door, through the shed, and out the door directly behind it. The path of this rail leads to an adit in the mountainside a few yards behind the building. It seems that the collapsed building behind the shed was a canopy shelter or enclosed passageway over a pair of metal rails leading from the adit to the shed.

Inside the shed, considerable litter remains on the floor. Glass fragments, metal hinges, window screen, stacked firewood, a box, food tins, stove pipe, small-diameter metal pipe, and other objects lie about. The shed building is supported near the center by a post holding up a ceiling beam.

The green building has a room that appears to have been used as a dwelling. On a white-painted wall just inside the door is a two-line inscription written in pencil. "Russell Lynde" is on the first line. Just below it is "9 11 1911".

Rafters support the wood planks of the roof. Part of a stove pipe remains in a roof opening, which allows the elements into the building. Three sides of the room are covered with horizontal wooden siding similar to what is on the outside of the building. The west end is composed of vertical planks, many of which are now warped and open to the elements. In one corner of the room is a small closet with a door. Above the closet is a single shelf with its own door. Opposite the closet in another corner is a small metal sink with a drain pipe leading below the floor. Signs of cabinetry and shelving, since removed, is apparent along the walls where someone painted around attached fixtures rather than remove the fixtures and paint the entire wall. The floor is wooden tongue-and-groove and rested upon planks. It was covered at one time with a linoleum-like mat. Remains of this patterned floor covering show that it was white, with blue, red, green, and gray lines in a simple plaid-like design. Around the room are shards of window glass and parts of the siding. Scattered on the walls are attached small metal disks.

At the rear of the green and shed buildings are the remains of a collapsed building or canopy. This would have sheltered the rails leading to the side of the mountain. Only the roof remains of this structure, with its planking covered with metal sheeting. In the vicinity of the Tip Top buildings are evidence of prospect pits and other disturbances.

In interpreting the site, it seems that waste rock came from the adit (now collapsed and completely covered by a rock slide) on a rail car, passed under a canopy, passed through the shed to the edge of the steep slope, where it was dumped. On top of the waste dump are the remains of a chute made of timbers and sheet metal. This structure has collapsed on top of the waste rock dump. Ore presumably came the same route, although it would have been stockpiled somewhere on the site and then hauled to a mill in ore carts. Alternatively, ore could have been sent down the chute to the Ontario site below, where it could have been stored and/or loaded onto ore carts.

Historic Context:

After several strikes on Florida Mountain by William Knott, J. F. Sullivan, and others in the 1870s, prospectors renewed their interest in Florida Mountain. The Tip Top claim, 1500 feet by 600 feet, was located in 1881 by Charles Nack, Frank Meyer, John Grete, Fred Grete and Joseph Denton.¹

The claim was later acquired and relocated by Taylor Gearhart in 1891. His partner by 1894 was John Feour. Any continuing interest in the claim by the other original locators is not mentioned in numerous references to the claim by the Avalanche. Subsequent references exclusively refer to Gearhart and Feour as the owners.

In 1894 after several years prospecting the area, the two exposed the vein in what the Idaho Avalanche reporter referred to as a "cross-cut open cut through the top-soil." The ledge was about twelve feet wide, a soft clay quartz colored white, pink, and brown with boulders intermixed in the vein. Early assays valued the ore at \$60 per ton. In the summer of 1894 Gearhart and Feour hired about ten men to excavate a shaft. Surface preparations included the construction of ore bins and a "quartz road" upon which to haul the ore to a mill. The Avalanche writer regarded the site as "nicely situated" for buildings and that the grade for the road would be favorable. The workers boarded at the Phillips and Sullivan boarding house, not far away, where a Mrs. R.L. McKenzie was in charge.²

By July negotiations were underway to buy the Lincoln Mill at Silver City. Teams were contracted to haul quartz. In addition to the Tip Top, Gearhart and Feour also owned the Mountain Boy claim, which was adjacent to the Tip Top just to the east. The two installed a rail track and car in this mine and pushed the work of developing here as well, the idea being to make interior connections with an old shaft for ventilation.³

The ore was said to be free milling. The owners hauled it to the Lincoln Mill, now under their control and remodeled to handle the Tip Top ore. They installed battery and table plates and Frue vanners. Meanwhile, sixteen miners were working to raise to the surface from the "south drift" for air, as they made connection to the Mountain Boy shaft. When they opened to the Mountain Boy shaft, they found it full of water. It ran out of the tunnel "like a mill race" and sank into the mountain rock before it could exit the mouth of the tunnel. Soon after, water appeared in the Tip Top shaft 300 feet away, demonstrating to the miners that the ledge was a continuous one and unobstructed by boulders or other blockages. The ore was soft and needed no blasting. It was worth from \$10 to several thousands per ton, the bullion worth from \$12 to \$14 per ounce.⁴

Around August of 1894, the owners "bonded" the mine and the mill for ninety days to Colonel G.V. Bryan, a miner from Hailey, who began to invest in and develop the property. The ore contained considerably more gold than silver and was compared favorably with the ores of the DeLamar mines further to the west.⁵ By winter, the men had filled the ore bins, sent ore to the mill, and ordered new sleds from the railroad for use on the snow. Alfred Hicks, a partner of Bryan, was in charge of the mine, while Tom Jones, was the new millwright.⁶

In early September the timbering of shaft was completed and the men had graded the ground near it for a new shaft house, which they then completed. They installed a steam hoist, a boardinghouse, and a bunk house. Ore chutes and bins were installed for the convenience of the ore haulers. Admiring the shaft timbering, the Avalanche reporter said on September 21 that they were all "framed square at the bearing, each side alike." Soon the men were drifting and stoping. There was talk of putting up a one-mile-long wire-rope tramway from the mine to the mill and 1,500 feet below, as a cheap alternative during winter months, but this is not referred to in future descriptions of operations and probably was not installed. At the mill site, when operations were ready, Mrs. Bryan, who had accompanied her husband to Silver City and took an interest in the operations, was the one to blow the whistle when the machinery started up. Enthusiasm ran high, and Bryan spoke of bringing electricity to the mill.⁷

The miners hauled quartz to the mill in a large new wagon, made in Silver City, with wheels that were nearly six feet in diameter. These supported a box that could carry 16,000 pounds of ore. With the wagon, eight horses, and the "trail," the men could deliver 23,000 pounds of ore to the mill every day.⁸

By November the main working shaft was in 100 feet, with various drifts in progress. The partners had milled 1,000 tons of ore. The vein was said to average fifteen feet wide. Another partner was mentioned as part of the company, a George Venable.⁹

The Bryan Brothers and Alfred Hicks completed their purchase of the Tip Top mine, related claims, and the mill. During 1895 they organized as the Tip Top Mining and Milling Company and continued to develop the mine. They sunk the Tip Top shaft 300 feet deep, taking out good assaying ore on the way. However, the refitted Lincoln mill proved unequal to the task of recovering the values in the ore. After some experimentation, the partners concluded that they could not save the metal by usual milling methods and stopped production.¹⁰ The Lincoln mill continued to operate as a custom mill for the next several years.¹¹

Although the Tip Top was inactive, some of its buildings remained in use. In November of 1895 the owners of the Alpine claim, which was located just across the summit of Florida Mountain from the Tip Top, were laying in supplies preparatory to winter development. The Alpine laborers lived at the Tip Top buildings until the snows of winter arrived, when the walk across the summit proved "too laborious." The Alpine developers then erected their own boarding house near the mouth of their mine.¹²

The Ontario claim and its extension was located below the Tip Top and slightly to the west of it. In 1896 Larry Ryson and Robert Norton had a contract to run the tunnel from the Ontario mine to the Tip Top shaft. They struck the shaft near its 300 foot level. Ore above that level was then hauled out of the Ontario tunnel, being a cheaper way out and also improving ventilation for the further work of sinking a deeper shaft.¹³

According to a report by Waldemar Lindgren, no work was done in 1897. After 1897, development of the Tip Top mine appears to be sporadic, irregular, and related to minimal

assessment work by a succession of buyers.¹⁴ In June 1897 the Owyhee County Recorder's Index of Mining Claims identifies Joseph M. Denton as the new locator of the Tip Top. Twelve months later, W.S. McCormick of Salt Lake City was similarly identified as the new locator.¹⁵ McCormick had arrived in Silver City in April 1898 accompanied by agents from Boston and New York. He bought the property and was soon rumored to be selling the Tip Top to a New York syndicate. The new plan was presumed to involve cross-cutting the vein from the south side of Florida Mountain near Coffee Gulch, where someone already begun such a tunnel.¹⁶ But the scheme never materialized.

After 1900 the Tip Top continued to pass from one group of owners to another. James Hutchinson of the Trade Dollar Consolidated Company secured a bond for the Tip Top group of claims and the mill site. He hoped to prospect the Tip Top group from a series of cross-cuts from the Trade Dollar tunnels located east of the Tip Top claim.¹⁷ He apparently did not proceed with this plan. On March 20, 1903, the Avalanche said the Tip Top group was to be sold to a newly organized Tip Top Mining Company of New York. The same sale was to include the Ontario and Banner group of mines.

Around 1903 Peter Steele, a cigar manufacturer from Silver City, organized the Banner Mining and Milling Company and absorbed the Tip Top group and many other claims. Although some of his claims produced during the 1920s, the Tip Top is not known to be one of them. Entries in the Owyhee County Recorder's Office that indicate the mine was relocated by M. Hyde in May 1908, by E.B. O'Donnell in September 1915, and by L.R. Shaver in July of 1940.¹⁸ It is not clear who these locators may have represented.

Annual reports filed by the Inspector of Mines during the years 1912 through 1957 occasionally mention the Tip Top. The 1915 report asserts that the mine equipment had been removed, no development work done, and no improvements made. Around 1931 Steele consolidated his Banner holdings with other claims under the name Empire Mines.

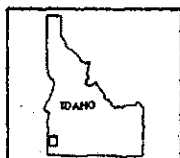
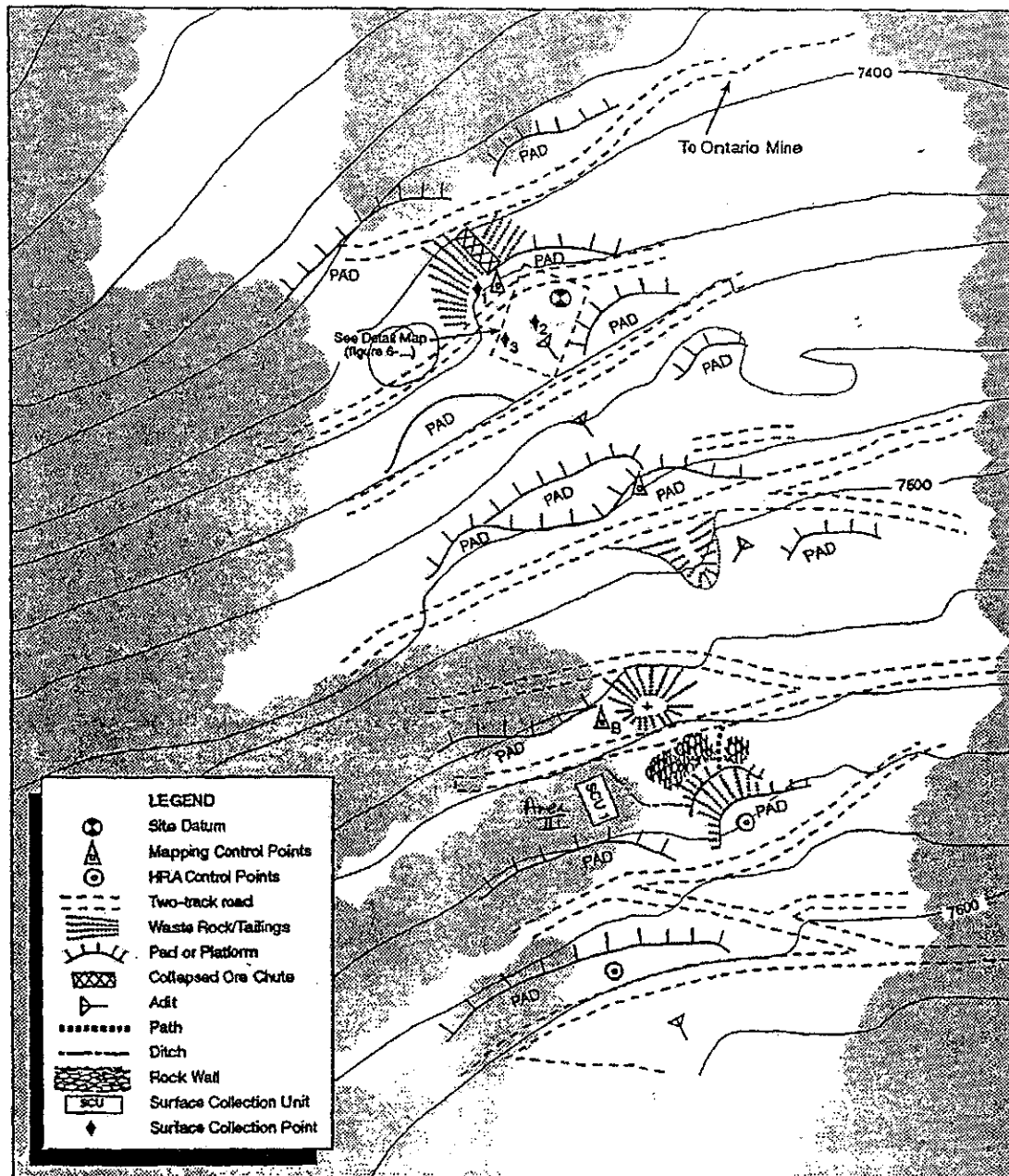
After Steele's death in 1938, his widow Marie Steele managed the properties, but did no work and acknowledged that she did not have "a complete record" of the history of the various mine works. In 1959 the affairs of the Empire Company were under the supervision of acting president William Langroise.¹⁹ Eventually the DeLamar Mines acquired the Tip Top and many other Florida Mountain properties. Its successor company, Kinross, now plans to mine the area using open-pit methods.

The Tip Top was one of many Florida Mountain lode mines that contributed to the prosperous decade of the 1890s in the Carson Mining District. Compared to the Black Jack, Empire, Phillips and Sullivan, and Trade Dollar mines, which operated during the same period, the Tip Top's day in the sun was fairly brief, contributing paying ore for only two or three short years. Ironically, this short-lived producer contains the most intact minehead buildings of any of the sites examined in this study.

END NOTES

1. Index to Mining Claims and Mining Claim Books at Assessor's Office, Murphy, Idaho, Book 6, page 664. See also "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, November 12, page 3. Instead of the name Joseph Denton, the newspaper notice says one of the locators was named Valkman.
2. "It's a Young Bonanza," Caldwell Tribune, June 27, 1894, page 3.
3. "Mining Mention," Idaho Avalanche, July 21, 1894, page 3.
4. "Mining Mention," Idaho Avalanche, July 28, 1894, page 2.
5. "Tip Top Mine Bonded," Idaho Avalanche, August 10, 1894 page 3. See also "The Tip Top a Bonanza," Caldwell Tribune, Aug 29, 1894, page 1.
6. "Mining Mention," Idaho Avalanche, August 17, 1894, page 3; and "Mining Mention, The Tip Top," Caldwell Tribune, December 22, 1894, page 2.
7. "Mining Mention," Idaho Avalanche, September 7, 1894 page 2, and "The Tip Top Mill," page 3. See also issue of September 21, page 3, "Water Power for the Tip Top."
8. "Mining Mention," Idaho Avalanche, October 12, 1894 page 3.
9. "Big Mine in Owyhee," Idaho Avalanche, November 2, 1894 page 1.
10. "The Tip Top," Owyhee Avalanche, August 23, 1895.
11. "Mills," Ned Williams, unpublished manuscript at Owyhee Museum, Murphy, Idaho, dated "received 1-29-86., page 3.
12. "Mining Mention!" Idaho Avalanche, November 29, 1895 Nov 29 page 1.
13. "Mining Mention, Tip Top," Caldwell Tribune, April 18, 1896 page 4.
14. See "Mining Mention," Idaho Avalanche, December 17, 1897 page 1.
15. Index to Mining Claims, Owyhee County Recorder's Office, Murphy, Idaho. Refers to Book 11, pages 304 and 424.

16. "Silver City Mines," Idaho Statesman, January 24, 1898, page 3; and "Mining Mention," Idaho Avalanche, April 27, 1898, page 1.
17. See Owyhee Avalanche, April 13, 1900.
18. Index to Mining Claims, previously cited, Book 14, page 308; Book 15, page 564; and Book 20, page 55, respectively.
19. Annual Reports of the Idaho State Mining Inspector, 1912 through 1957.



TIP TOP MINE

